

**2022-2023 Annual Report
of the
JAMES V. "CAPT'N JIM" MCMAHAN
COMMISSION ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
FOR HARFORD COUNTY, MARYLAND**

Harford County Councilman: (2022) Andre V. Johnson, Liaison

Harford County Councilman: (2023) Aaron D. Penman, Liaison

Chairperson: Mr. Robert A. Brown

Vice Chair: (2022) Mr. Hayden Anthony

Vice Chair: (2023) Ms. Warline Bryant

June 20, 2023

Mission and Vision

Mission: To advocate for our veterans and their families and connect them to resources through outreach and education.

Vision: A Harford County community that is responsive to the needs of Veterans and their families.

Duties and Responsibilities:

To research, assemble, analyze, and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of all veterans and their families.

To institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans.

To advise the County Executive and County Council on the status of programs and services in the state and County related to the needs of veterans and their families.

To assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.

Introduction

Description

This report covers the period June 1, 2022, to June 1, 2023. During this time the previous administration's Veterans Commission members' terms of service ended on December 5, 2022, and new members were appointed on May 9, 2023.

The James V. "Capt'n Jim" McMahan Commission on Veterans Affairs for Harford County ("Veterans Commission") is a volunteer organization appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. The appointed and auxiliary members may be from any military branch or service as well as non-veteran members who all work to improve the lives of veterans and their families using their expertise, personal and professional contacts, and talents. Many Veterans Commission members are active in local, county, state, and national volunteer service organizations and bring the needs of those organizations to the Veterans

Commission. The Veteran Commission members volunteer to work on various subcommittees, work groups, and projects commensurate with expertise, requirements, and need.

Report Summary

The Veterans Commission resumed full in-person community and event participation after two years of limited in-person outreach due to COVID-19 restrictions. Event participation included the Bel Air 4th of July Parade, Veterans and Memorial Day ceremonies, Retiree Appreciation Day, information tabling events, and the Annual Veterans Resource Fair. Veterans Commission meetings also returned to an in-person format. Veterans Commission members were active in meetings and workshops with other county's veterans' commissions and the State of Maryland and Federal Veterans Affairs veterans programs to include Veteran Collaboratives, Maryland Joint County Veterans Commission Meetings, Veteran Service Officer and Congressional Stakeholder meetings, Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Workshops, APG Transition Assistance Program, and Crisis Intercept Mapping.

Requests for assistance from veterans and their family members increased from previous years. Inquiries regarding benefits and claims remained the major category of requests, followed by housing, employment, and VA healthcare.

The Veterans Commission utilized a wide network of support from Harford County government, local non-government organizations and agencies, Veterans Service Organizations ("VSOs"), Maryland State agencies and the Maryland VA, and the US Department of Veterans Affairs including both the Baltimore-Washington Veterans Benefits Regional Office and the VA Maryland Healthcare System.

Information sheets were distributed, and discussions included during the Veterans Commission monthly meetings informing Commission members about changing veteran benefits and laws that impact veterans and/or their families. Guest speakers updated the Veterans Commission on local, state, and federal regulations and initiatives.

The Commission Membership

The Commission membership consists of thirteen appointed members. Twelve members are appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council for a four-year term. The County Council appoints one County Council member as a liaison to serve as the Commission Coordinator. The County Executive also appoints three ex-officio members: The Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) Garrison Commander or designee to represent APG, a Harford Community College representative for veterans' educational issues, and a representative from the Harford County Chamber of Commerce (HCC). The County Executive designates a chairperson, and the members elect a Vice-Chair and Recording Secretary. There are also several Auxiliary Members who attend meetings and volunteer to participate in events.

The Commission Coordinator's Legislative Aide played an important role in receiving messages and veteran information requests via phone and email, and then passing this information to the Veterans Commission for action during the time of the 2022 Veterans Commission. A change was made in 2023. The calls and messages are fielded by a member of the County Staff, who receives similar requests for assistance from the Harford County community, and then she passes the requests on to the Veterans Commission for resolution.

The APG Garrison Commander is a vital link between the Veterans Commission and APG. Colonel Casiano, who recently changed command, attended the monthly Veterans Commission meetings, and updated the Commission on APG and military activities as well as listening to the issues presented by the Veterans Commission members and acting on requests as appropriate. His Public Affairs Officer, a veteran, attended the Commission meetings. On June 15th Colonel Philip J. Mundweil assumed command of the APG Garrison and we expect he will have the same high level of commitment to the Veterans Commission as the past APG Garrison Commanders.

Members work on various special areas and workgroups aligned with the on Veterans Commission's Bylaws, Duties, and Responsibilities, including Information for Veterans, Programs and Outreach, Coordination with Veteran Service Organizations, and Public Events and Recognition. Most members serve on multiple workgroups, and often collaborate across workgroups to better serve Veterans.

Previous Administration Veterans' Commission Members. Membership Completed December 5, 2022:

Andre V. Johnson: County Council Appointed Member and Commission Coordinator

Appointed Members

Robert A. Brown, Chairman
Hayden J. Anthony, Vice Chair
Lisa J. Brown, Secretary
Simon Ballard
Jennifer M. Button
Arthur F. Kaff

Scott A. Kearby
Dennis B. Miller
William H. Montgomery III
Denise E. Perry
Victor R. Petrosino
Pamela Silcox

Ex-Officio Members Designated by the County Executive:

Barbara Travers: Harford County Community College representative; Veterans Educational Issues

Mike Ray: Harford County Chamber of Commerce Representative

Colonel Johnny Casiano: The Garrison Commander of Aberdeen Proving Ground

Current Veterans' Commission Members Membership Commencing May 9, 2023:

Aaron D. Penman: County Council Appointed Member and Commission Coordinator

Appointed Members

Robert A. Brown, Chairman
Warline Bryant, Vice Chair
Dennis Miller, Secretary
Joseph Boddiford
Robert Citrullo
John Favara

Brian Kelly
Kirk Vollmecke
Denise Carnaggio
Jay Ellenby
Thomas Knapp
James Ports

Ex-Officio Members Designated by the County Executive:

Barbara Travers: Harford County Community College Representative

Timothy Farmer: Harford County Chamber of Commerce Representative

Colonel Philip J. Mundweil: The Garrison Commander of Aberdeen Proving Ground

Simon Ballard, Harford County Community Services, now serves as the Veterans Resource Coordinator assisting the Veterans Commission.

Major Veterans Commission Events and Programs:

Veterans Resource Fair. The annual Veterans Commission Resource Fair was held at the Bel Air Armory on November 12th, 2022. The event theme was "Honoring Harford County's Veterans and Their Families." Approximately 375 veterans, service and family members participated, which was a slight increase over the previous year. Participants visited with 22 resource vendors. Vendors included the Veterans Benefits Administration to assist with claims and vocational programs, the Veterans Health Administration, the State of Maryland VA, Maryland Commitment to Veterans, Harford County agencies, and non-profit organizations. A buffet lunch was offered free of charge to participants. The revised Veterans Discount and Resource Guides were made available to all who attended.

The Resource Fair commenced with an opening ceremony featuring County Executive Barry Glassman and Major General Robert Edmondson II, Commanding General Communications and Electronics Command and Senior Commander at APG. County Executive Glassman and MG Edmondson then presented the awards for the poster and essay contest sponsored by the Susquehanna Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America. APGFCU sponsored the raffle drawing for one large-screen TV and gift cards.

Harford County Veterans Photo Gallery of Honor. The Photo Gallery of Honor is now a permanent part of the Veterans Commission website, recognizing Harford County Veterans.

The Harford County Executive Staff continues to receive submissions and enhance the Gallery of Honor.

Claims Clinic. The Veterans Commission sponsored the Veterans Alliance Claims Clinic at Harford Community College on September 7, 2022. The Veterans Alliance is composed of the Federal VA and State VA benefits and health departments, and Veterans Appeals representatives. The Claims Clinics are different from a Resource Fair because they are focused on detailed claims and health benefits one-on-one assistance from state and federal level claims representatives rather than other veteran services. Claims Clinics are conducted in a different Maryland county once a quarter, with Harford County the second county selected for a clinic. Participants must register before the clinic, which enables the VA to research their file prior to the clinic. The event was highly successful with over 100 attendees receiving personalized claims help, and some veteran claims were completed on site with a disability rating provided. Harford County should be in line for the next clinic in 2024.

Memorial Day Ceremony. The Veterans Commission participated in the 2023 Bel Air Memorial Day ceremony at Shamrock Park in Bel Air with a wreath presentation from the Commission and County Executive Cassilly. Commission members answered questions from veterans, provided light refreshments, and promoted the Veterans Resource Fair. Veterans Commission members also attended Aberdeen and Havre de Grace ceremonies and the ceremony at the Baltimore National VA Cemetery.

Central Maryland Veteran Collaboratives. Sponsored by the non-profit "Serving Together" organization, the Veterans Commission and Harford County Department of Community Services participate in monthly virtual Veterans Collaboratives along with similar organizations in Baltimore, Howard, and Anne Arundel Counties. These interactive meetings between service providers and community organizations serve as an action-oriented platform to share knowledge, celebrate wins, identify gaps, learn together, and build relationships. Topics vary each month, and each county in Central Maryland is asked to host a different topic such as employment, mental health, veterans' courts, and benefits. Harford County has hosted mental health and veterans' legal issues topics.

Participation and Collaboration with the State of Maryland Veterans Outreach Initiatives. The Maryland State Department of Veterans Affairs "Governors Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families" program continues to grow and aid counties. Since March of 2021, the Harford County Veterans Commission and the Harford County Department of Community Services has been working with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and their Technical Assistance Center for the "Crisis Intercept Mapping" project for suicide awareness, education, and prevention.

Harford County was selected by the State of Maryland to pilot the Crisis Intercept Mapping project for Maryland. Due to the success of this project in Harford County and participation in the Governor's Challenge workgroup, the Maryland Commitment to Veterans (Maryland Department of Health) Director and Harford County Veterans Commission Chair were asked to

provide a workshop and poster presentation at the March 2023 national VA/SAMHSA Innovations Conference. Harford County's "ask the Question" rack cards were highlighted and distributed to all 50 state and 6 American Territories representatives. The Maryland VA Secretary received the presentation and briefing on June 9th. The Harford County program is being promoted as a model for other Maryland counties.

Outreach Functions and Support Activities.

- Aberdeen Proving Ground Retiree Appreciation Day
- National Association of Counties Operation Green Light
- Question-Persuade-Refer (QPR) training coordination between the Department of Community Services trainers with Veteran Service Organizations
- State of Maryland Joint County Veteran Commission Meetings
- Wreaths Across America wreath laying in Bel Air and Havre de Grace cemeteries
- Sergeant Alfred B. Hilton (MOH) events
- Gilchrist Hospice Vietnam Veterans Welcome Home Ceremony in Baltimore
- Harford County Employees Veterans Day breakfast and Marine Corps flag raising
- Hospital visits from the Veterans Commission Chaplain

Assistance Requests. The Veterans Commission supported veterans and their families by coordinating support requested for VA claims and benefits, healthcare, tax information, coordination for VA Social Worker assistance, obtaining military records, contacting Patient Advocates at the VA Hospital, employment opportunities, unemployment benefits, legal assistance, housing repairs assistance, donation of items, funeral support, scholarship information, and answering information requests from Veteran Service Organizations. The partnership with county government, federal and state VAs, and the military made a high level of support possible.

Social Media Communication

Facebook. The Commission's Facebook page was the major platform to post and provide information relating to veteran events and opportunities. This is now shifting to the revised Veterans Commission website. A commission member was the focal point to receive and then post information from internal and outside sources. The Harford County Veterans Commission Facebook site is located at <https://www.facebook.com/HarfordVeterans12>.

Website. The County Veterans Commission website is an important tool for veterans to contact the Veterans Commission for support. The website is updated to include meeting minutes, agendas, and assistance information along with the Virtual Wall of Honor. The website is undergoing a major revision in 2023 to include more links for information, a calendar of veteran events, and a directory of Veteran Service Organizations. Veteran Service Organizations are encouraged to send information about their major events and organizations to the Veterans

Commission for posting and information sharing. The Veterans Commission is partnering with technical experts in the County Executive staff to upgrade the website.

Partnering and Support with Other County Agencies

The Veterans Commission has benefitted from the talents and support of the Executive Staff. The Harford County Veterans Photo Gallery of Honor, Veterans Day event for county workers, design and printing of the 2022 and 2023 Veterans Resource Fair marketing material, and assistance with the Veterans Resource guide are a few of projects made possible through their work.

The Harford County Community Services Director and staff collaborated with the Veterans Commission on projects and events, developed materials for the Crisis Intercept Mapping, "Ask the Question" campaign, and provided contacts within other Harford County agencies to assist with veterans' requests for assistance. These points of contact are especially useful when veterans do not qualify for federal or state VA assistance.

Partnering with Federal and State Departments of Veterans Affairs

The Veterans Commission received impactful assistance from VSO, State, and Federal organizations that improved the lives of Veterans. There are many agencies that have significantly helped the Veterans Commission. Noteworthy for their continued support are:

- The Maryland State Veterans Service Officers, located in the Bel Air MVA and the Annapolis office, compassionately and expertly handle repeated requests and referrals from the Veterans Commission for veterans benefits help and in-person appointments.
- The VA Maryland Health Care Systems (VAMHCS) Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator (CEPC) is now assisting the Veterans Commission with social work and mental health related issues. She is also a lead member and helped facilitate the Crisis Intercept Mapping sessions.

Speakers and Information Sessions presented during Commission meetings:

- Mary Kay Herrick from the Elkton Vet Center discussed the eligibility, operations, and services offered at the VA Vet Centers.
- Cynthia Cavalieri, Director of the Federal Executive Board (FEB) in Baltimore, presented information on the FEB with emphasis on veteran workforce development, assistance for transitioning military members, and emergency preparedness.
- Joe Sliwka, Director of Harford County Community Services, provided an overview of his department and offered support to the Veterans Commission.

Commission Upcoming Projects and Goals

- Outreach to and partnership with the Veteran Service Organizations to learn their needs and how the Veterans Commission can assist them and their members.
- Outreach to veterans to learn how their talents can be used in the Harford County Community.
- Revise the Veterans Commission webpage to include VSO information, upcoming events, and links to information.
- Respond to the needs and requests of veterans by quickly finding resources, assistance, and guidance as required.
- Participate in events such as the Fourth of July parades, Veteran Day observances, and Wreaths Across America.
- Support the development of a Harford County Veterans Court.
- Continue to promote the Governor's Challenge and Crisis Intercept Mapping projects.

Conclusion

The James V. "Capt'n Jim" McMahan Commission on Veterans Affairs for Harford County has a new slate of commission members but the same commitment to serving veterans and their families. Renewed emphasis will be on assisting Veteran Service Organizations while trying to reach those veterans who may not be affiliated with any veteran group, but who have talents and skills and a desire to assist their fellow veterans. The Veterans Commission is thankful for the support of the County Executive and his staff, the County Council, and the many Harford County agencies that have assisted the Veterans Commission throughout the past year.